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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 BAGHDAD 002683

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: AUGUST 8-9 BORDER SECURITY WORKING GROUP MEETING:  
MIXED BAG WITH MIXED SUCCESS

REF: DAMASCUS 0814

Classified By: Political Military Counselor Marcie B. Ries. Reason: 1  
.4 (b) & (d).

[11](#). (S) SUMMARY: GOI and neighboring country delegations plus P5, UN, EU, and Arab League observers met in Damascus August 8-9 to develop steps to be taken by participants to stem the flow of foreign terrorists and arms fueling the violence in Iraq. While all neighboring countries were unanimous in their expressions of solidarity for the security and stability of Iraq, developing the concrete actions championed by the observers was more elusive, as bilateral irritants, vocalized by the Iranian, Egyptian, and Jordanian delegations, crept into the proceedings.

[12](#). (S) While a six-point recommendation paper (below) which was produced at conference-end failed to break new ground, the agreement on a technical experts meeting within a month's time to develop operational-level recommendations, was a good outcome for a gathering of diplomats with differing levels of enthusiasm and commitment to Iraqi security. Syria used the USG presence at the proceedings to propose trilateral meetings with Iraq to discuss border security. END SUMMARY.

[13](#). (S) Per the recommendations made at the Neighboring Countries conference held in Sharm al-Sheikh in May, delegations from Iraq, neighboring states, plus Egypt, Bahrain, P5 members, UNAMI, and the Arab League met in Damascus August 8-9 to discuss ways to control the common borders to stem the flow of foreign terrorists and arms into Iraq. The SARG opened the meeting with remarks from Interior Minister Bassam Majeed. Stressing the brotherly bonds among the neighboring countries, Majeed deplored the violence in Iraq, which has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians. He noted up front that the SARG had already taken a number of steps to control the common border with Iraq, listing measures such as fixed and mobile patrols along the borders, as well as barriers. He added that entry controls for young men less than 30 years old were tightened. Those caught trying to cross the borders illegally were detained and held for questioning before being turned over to security authorities in their home countries. Majeed said that airport procedures had been implemented but did not elaborate. In a dig at the U.S. and the UK, Majeed said that

the SARG could do more but "unfulfilled promises" like the delivery of night vision goggles were an impediment to better security procedures. Majeed pledged SARG willingness for sincere and lasting cooperation with Iraq, particularly within the framework of the MOU between the Interior Ministries of the two countries and the Protocol of Cooperation between Iraq and the neighboring states, and to continue to meet on this issue.

¶4. (S) Speaking on behalf of the Iraqi delegation, Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi thanked the participants for their presence at the meeting, which was a reflection of their concern for Iraq and their desire to improve the security situation. The Iraqi people have suffered greatly from terrorist acts, and Iraq's infrastructure has been destroyed. The violence, which has claimed thousands of lives, made no distinction between Shia and Sunni. None of the participants at the meeting, Abbawi said, would "put up" with the level and kinds of violence occurring in Iraq. Likewise, no country in the region benefits from a weak Iraq. The violence was not just a threat to Iraq, he warned, but a threat to all countries, as this type of violence could easily spill over the borders. To prevent this scenario, it was imperative that all countries cooperate to improve the security in Iraq. He welcomed suggestions of practical steps that could be taken to control the borders. Labeed urged that existing security agreements be implemented to achieve this goal. The GOI for its part would apply practical solutions and follow through with agreed upon measures. Labeed lavished praise on the SARG for hosting the event, a tangible demonstration of their concern for the safety and security of Iraq.

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¶5. (S) Taking over the chair from SARG Head of the Political Security Department, Mohammed Mansoura, Abbawi called on Iraqi MOI Deputy MG Hussein Ali Kamal to deliver remarks on the situation in Iraq. Kamal echoed Abbawi's warning that terrorism was not only an Iraqi problem; the absence of security assistance to Iraq and cooperation among neighboring countries will lead to spillover. He also reiterated the need to implement existing security agreements between Iraq and participant countries. On specific steps to help Iraq, Kamal said that the participant countries should prevent the issuance by some clerics of inflammatory fatwas that incite sectarian violence in Iraq.

#### OBSERVERS LOOKING FOR CONCRETE STEPS

6 (S) The message delivered by observer delegations (UN, Arab League, P5, EU) was unanimous in the call for participants to work together to identify concrete, practical steps that could be enacted to bring an end to the terrorism and violence costing the lives of innocent Iraqis. Baghdad Deputy UNAMI head Michael von Shuellenberg said that agreement on a course of action would enable the UN to offer technical assistance and training in border security and control. Arab League delegation head Hisham Yussef said participants had come to stand with Iraq, the axis of the Middle East. Cooperation on Iraqi security was important, and had been confirmed at the conference in Riyadh in September 2006. A strong Iraq would ensure its own security and enable the Coalition Forces to return home. On that note, Yussef alluded to the UNSCR 1723, and the responsibility of the Coalition Forces to provide security and to respect human rights according to international law. Properly trained forces capable of carrying out their duties and national reconciliation were the key to a secure Iraq. EU representative (as Portugal is not represented in Damascus) French Ambassador Michel duClos reiterated support for a stable Iraq and hoped to see practical steps. The EU was ready to contribute to this endeavor. Speaking for the GOF as well, duClos stressed the need for common political will, identification of practical measures for participants to implement, and definition of a follow-up mechanism to

implement the agreed-upon steps.

¶7. (S) Turkish delegate Ambassador Murat Ocelek, Deputy Special Envoy for Iraq Affairs, summed up activity that had occurred over the past year at Sharm al-Sheikh and Riyadh, noting that the Protocol for Security and Cooperation provided all the concrete elements required to take forward action on security in Iraq. Ocelek said Iraqi PM Maliki had just been in Turkey, at which time, the GOT reiterated its support for Iraq. On combating terrorism he said Turkey wanted to see an Iraq that was not a threat to its neighbors and at peace. Regardless of political differences, neighboring countries had to join together on common issues. As all the other observers had spoken, U.S. delegation head made a brief statement using the Department-cleared press guidance calling for "practical steps for Iraqi security" to come out of the conference. U.S. delegation members were Embassy Damascus Charge Michael Corbin, Embassy Baghdad Deputy Political Military Counselor Karen Sasahara, Embassy Baghdad DHS Attache Stephen Mangino, and MNF-I personnel Colonel Cheryl Smart and Daniel Landers.

#### MIXED SYMPATHY FOR GOI FROM NEIGHBORS

¶8. (S) In a brusque presentation that focused more on the security threat to Jordan than on sympathy for Iraq, Jordanian Interior Ministry Chief of Staff Mukhimer Abu Khamous agreed that security and stability in Iraq were important for all neighboring countries. Noting that Jordan had its own experience with terrorism, the GOJ was currently doing all that it could to police its side of the border and take steps to tighten passport and visa procedures for entry. Khamous called on all countries, including Iraq, to do their part to control the borders. The GOJ would not allow anyone to use its territory to launch attacks.

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¶9. (S) Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry Arab Affairs Director Ambassador Jassim al-Mubarak and Bahraini Royal Academy for Police Colonel Tarek Hassan Hassan stated that shared responsibility for the security and stability of Iraq could occur through activation of security agreements. Ambassador al-Mubarak welcomed the opportunity for cooperation on security and stability in Iraq at the upcoming interior ministers conference to be held in Kuwait City in October and expressed his support for the practical measures proposed by Iraq in its draft paper circulated before the conference. Notably absent was Saudi Arabia, surprising the Iraqi delegation, which said they had been told by the SAG two weeks earlier that it would participate in the conference. (Note: the SAG did not send representatives to the other two Sharm al-Sheikh working groups on energy and refugees End note).

¶10. (S) Egyptian delegate head Ambassador Hani Khalaf, Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and Middle Eastern Affairs, called for the implementation of all resolutions from the Sharm al-Sheikh and Riyadh conferences. In a swipe at the Iraqi delegation, Khalaf said that the Iraqi paper circulated to participants contained only requests to its neighbors, but did not lay out the responsibility of the GOI to protect its citizens. Security was not a one-sided matter; Egypt already was taking a number of steps to achieve security, such as information exchange to prevent any terrorist actions in Egypt, tightening of the border to prevent Egypt from being used as a transit point or launching pad for terrorist actions. The GOE also was introducing tamper-proof passports. Khalaf also raised the 2004 assassination of Egyptian Ambassador to Iraq Ihan Sharif, noting that those responsible had still not been brought to justice.

#### IRAN PUSHES ITS OWN SECURITY CONCERNS

¶11. (S) Mohammed Jallal Firoozaneh, DG of Persian Gulf Affairs at the Iranian MFA, said Iran wanted to see stability

and security return to Iraq, and was ready to cooperate to achieve this goal and stem activities like cross border drug trafficking within the framework of accords from the protocol of the interior ministers. On counter terrorism and border control, security cooperation on all levels was in the interest of all parties. Iran was ready to work with the GOI based on accords between the two countries. Alluding to upcoming border demarcation talks with Iraq later this month, Firoozaneh said "reactivation" of accords dealing with border issues would facilitate security.

¶12. (S) Firoozadeh took the opportunity to slam Iraq by raising the MEK and PPK issue, condemning the "double standard" created by some countries whose territory is used by these two groups to stage attacks against Iran. Iraq was suffering, he said, because of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Firoozadeh said Iran was ready to help Iraq through its support of the political process, and its support for national unity and democracy in Iraq.

#### GOI RECLAMAS ITS CRITICS

¶13. (S) Irritated by digs from Egypt, Jordan, and Iran, Abbawi scrapped the afternoon workshops on border security and organized crime to present a reclama. MG Kamal elaborated on steps the GOI had taken to improve security, including new passports with security features. On militia infiltration into the security services, Kamal said that the MOI had been cleaned up. He added that there were a large number of foreign terrorists currently in custody, noting that the majority were Saudi and Egyptian. In response to the Egyptian delegate's pique that the GOE had not been notified about detentions of its citizens and a request for their names, Kamal said the GOI was ready to provide any information on individuals in custody to their governments.

¶14. (S) Abbawi praised the role of the Coalition Forces and the UN for their effective role in Iraq, especially in

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security issues. Iraq was asking for new ideas, not new commitments. Iraq needs cooperation to stop the 50-80 people a day who cross the Syrian border. Among the nationalities in detention were some 800 Iranians, all charged with terrorist acts. Others were detained for smuggling arms and drugs. Iraq would benefit from provision of new equipment for border control or document verification. Abbawi asked Jordan to reconsider its visa procedures for Iraqis seeking to enter Jordan. Airline tickets were costly and Iraqis denied entry into Jordan were incurring large financial losses. Implicitly addressing Iran, Abbawi said that newly manufactured, more powerful arms were being smuggled over the border for use in Iraq, killing innocent civilians.

¶15. (S) Abbawi proposed the formation of a group of neighboring countries plus the U.S. to discuss in detail border issues, the goal being to develop practical recommendations. Abbawi said that one of the goals of the Iraqi delegation wanted to achieve was to send a signal to the people of Iraq that real steps would be taken.

¶16. (S) Responding to the GOI reclama, Iranian delegate head Firoozadeh said that participants should be seeking cooperation rather than trading accusations without proof. His delegation came to negotiate and advocate practical steps. He reiterated the readiness of Iran to cooperate within the framework of agreements. Citing the security agreement between Iran and Iraq, Firoozadeh expressed "surprise" that the agreements were not implemented to the fullest extent, adding that Iran was ready to engage with the GOI on all levels. He said that Iran was ready to officially reopen the border at Bashma. Firoozadeh asserted that Iraq's security responsibility would be more effective in the hands of the GOI, given that the "false policy" of the Coalition Forces in Iraq had led to an increase in terrorism. Firoozaneh deplored the U.S. detention of Iranian

"diplomats" in Iraq and said Iraq was detaining Iranians "who were in Iraq simply to visit religious sites." Firoozadeh added that the Coalition forces were working with terrorists in Iraq against Iran.

¶17. (S) On arms smuggling, Iran had not received any information on this matter but stood ready to discuss it with the GOI. Firoozadeh claimed that some 100,000 weapons had been smuggled into Iran from Iraq. Border security, he said was a two-way street and looked to the GOI to take steps to stem infiltration into Iran. Alluding to the PKK, Firoozadeh claimed there were instances of communications support offered to "terrorist groups" based in Kurdistan and southern Iraq. Firoozadeh advocated bilateral discussions as the best mechanism to deal with security issues, calling for a timetable to establish these communications. Recommendations of these groups could then be forwarded to the Ministers of neighboring countries. Returning to the MEK, Firoozadeh said that the group ("hypocrite organization") was a terrorist organization whose members should be turned over to Iran.

¶18. (S) Responding to Firoozadeh, Abbawi thanked the delegate for his confidence in the GOI to handle security, but pointed out the task of training and expanding Iraqi armed forces and security services were considerable and needed time. The GOI could not do this alone and needed the counter terrorism expertise of the Coalition Forces. The more help Iraq received, the better Iraq would be able to undertake its security responsibilities and the Coalition Forces would be able to return home.

SYRIA STEPS UP TO THE CT PLATE -- AND SENDS THE USG A MESSAGE.

¶19. (S) At the invitation of the GOI delegation, MOI official General Mohamed Mansoura laid out for the participants security steps taken by the SARG to control the border. He described SARG efforts, consisting mainly of static and mobile patrols along the border, as well as concrete anti-vehicle barriers and checkpoints. The SARG also monitored comings and goings on the border to interdict

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individuals seeking to cross into Iraq. Mansoura did not mention the new security measures that Syrian Interior Minister Majeed noted in his opening remarks the previous day and made no reference to measures at airports other than to say many Arab males had been sent back to their countries of origin. In explaining how difficult it was to police the common border with Iraq, Mansoura did not pass up the opportunity to mention again the much-hoped for night vision goggle acquisition, blaming the UK defense attache in Damascus for not making good on his word to procure them for the SARG. Referring to the September 2006 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, Mansoura said the SARG also had experienced terrorism. Syria was ready for further counter-terrorism cooperation.

¶20. (S) Twice, during the two-day proceedings, Abbawi approached the U.S. delegation to pitch on behalf of the SARG a trilateral meeting between Iraq, Syria, and the U.S. to discuss border security on the margins of the conference. Making it clear he was approached by the SARG during the numerous bilateral sessions held between the two delegations after the arrival of the GOI delegation on August 6, Abbawi said the SARG wanted to discuss Iraq security, but the absence of normal diplomatic channels made it difficult. The SARG also inquired about the return of a U.S. ambassador to Damascus. All SARG approaches via the GOI were rebuffed.

¶21. (S) Comment: While it appeared at times that the participants would not make it past the agreement to agree stage, neighboring countries pulled together enough to reach consensus on the need to move forward on cooperation with Iraq to stabilize the country. Regional politics reared its head regularly during the proceedings, underscoring the



reality that bilateral tensions between Iraq and some neighboring countries were real impediments to galvanizing concrete action. In between expressions of brotherly support and solidarity for Iraq, participants were unusually frank in vocalizing their issues with Baghdad.

¶22. (S) To the SARG's credit, it allowed the Iraqi delegation to stay front and center throughout the meeting, rather than seek to dominate the meeting in an attempt to compete with Tehran. Abbawi, who told us prior to departure that he did not have high expectations for the meeting, was satisfied with the proceedings, opining that true experts, rather than diplomats, might have the best chance to develop a list of actionable steps for neighboring countries to take. The Iraqis will need to carry forward their well-organized approach to the experts meeting, but most importantly, to get political agreement to real cooperation when the interior ministers review the work. End Comment.

¶23. (U) This cable was cleared with Embassy Damascus.

(Begin text)

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERIOR MINISTERS

The Security Cooperation and Coordination Committee of the Neighboring Countries met for two days in Damascus August 8 and 9, 2007. After hearing observations of the Iraqi delegation about the current security situation in Iraq and its security needs for its efforts directed at creating security and stability in Iraq and to control its borders, and after hearing some beneficial interventions from all the delegations participating in the meeting, which took place in a positive and constructive environment, the following was agreed, to be raised as recommendations in the upcoming ministerial meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the neighboring countries, as well as the ministers of interior:

1 - Continue all efforts directed at stopping all types of support to armed terrorist groups, and ending the provision of support for the forces supporting them, inside and outside Iraq, including working on drying up the resources for

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financing these groups.

2 - Activate and implement all bilateral security agreements and Arab agreements, and especially the agreement signed in Jeddah in September 2006, between Iraq and the neighboring countries in the areas of combating terrorism and organized crime and the prevention of infiltration. Also agree to form bilateral committees within which there are no joint sub-committees.

3 - Assure the acceleration of the sharing of security and intelligence information on terrorist groups and their movements, organization and sources of support; as well as coordination between Iraqi organizations and their counterparts in neighboring countries through direct contacts by way of liaison officers who will shoulder this responsibility.

4 - Control of the border is a shared responsibility for Iraq and its neighbors. Combating terrorism, organized crime and infiltration and smuggling weapons and explosives, and the like, requires collective joint effort to prevent all of these illicit acts in Iraq, and across the joint land, river and sea borders to it. Therefore we welcome the convoking of a meeting on the level of experts of the working group on the border security of Iraq, and agree by consensus to invite any party as an observer who is able to participate in the achievement of the desired objectives. The meeting will study all details related to securing the borders, preventing infiltration and smuggling, and looking into the technical

needs of all the participating countries, and respond to these needs in the shortest time, and that this meeting should be convoked within a period not exceeding one month.

5 - Preventing incitement to violence and declaring others infidels in any manner or means, and recommending against collaborating with Iraqi elements that support terrorism and declare other infidels (takfir) or stir up sectarian disorder, or undermine the political process in Iraq.

6 - The necessity of being unbiased towards one group at the expense of another group in Iraq, and encouraging participation in political activity and recourse to peaceful means to express political positions, and that all brothers and friends in the neighboring countries have an effective and positive role in national dialogue and national reconciliation.

(End Text)

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